



STREETVIBES \$1

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City Ignores Plea for Fair Hiring

Commission won't listen,
mayor misleads media

By ELI BRAUN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Cincinnati's Fair Hiring Now Coalition rallied at City Hall on Feb. 25 to deliver over 1,000 letters from city residents and community groups asking Mayor Mark Mallory and his appointed Civil Service Commission to end their policy of denying city jobs to qualified applicants who have felony convictions.

The Civil Service Commission is responsible for establishing screening standards used in the hiring of certain civil service employees for the city of Cincinnati.

For at least three years the mayor and the Civil Service Commission have refused to acknowledge that a no-felon hiring policy even exists, much less consider creating a smarter policy. The AMOS Project, the Ohio Justice & Policy Center and the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission therefore joined together to draw attention to the discriminatory practice.

The city's obstructionist stance was only more deeply confirmed by its response to the rally.

Representatives of the Fair Hiring Now Coalition planned to testify during the commission's regular Feb. 25 meeting, but upon learning of the rally, the commission canceled the section for public comment. Over 50 Cincinnati residents arrived at City Hall for the commission's 9 a.m. meeting only to find that they would have no opportunity to testify. News crews from WLWT and WXIX captured their surprise on video.

After the rally, the mayor's staff called the news stations to deny that the city had a no-felon hiring policy. It was all a miscommunication, the mayor's staff asserted. The news stations pulled the stories.

The concerted efforts of

respected community groups representing thousands of Cincinnatians apparently arose from a misunderstanding that could be cleared up by a single phone call.

The morning after the rally, Mallory taped a segment for WKRC's *Newsmakers* with Dan Hurley, in which he once again denied that the city's no-felon hiring policy existed.

"There is not a blanket policy

that says we cannot hire felons," Mallory said. "It's always been my belief that you have to give people that second opportunity. The city of Cincinnati can't be exempt."

Mallory's claim doesn't match the evidence, according to David Singleton, executive director of the Ohio Justice & Policy Center.

"Bottom line," he said on a different segment of *Newsmakers*, "if you're applying for a civil service job, you're not going to get it if you have a criminal record."

While the mayor maintains one façade for the cameras, he presides over a government that denies rehabilitated people with criminal records the opportunity to work for their city.

Stop That Singing

The commission canceled its public comment section the afternoon before the rally. It did not explain why. There was no time to alert community members who planned to attend.

"That train had left the station," said organizer Stephen JohnsonGrove, who directs the Second Chance Project at the Ohio Justice & Policy Center, where he focuses on alleviating barriers faced by former offenders.

While organizers passed out an agenda and song sheet, Cincinnati Police Sgt. Richard Antoine told the group, "There will be no singing or



The Fair Hiring Now Coalition demands change. Photo by Nate Wenstrup.

Council Turns Backs on Metropole Tenants

Millions in subsidies for boutique hotel

By PAUL KOPP
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Robert Britton sat calmly as he waited to speak at the March 3 meeting of Cincinnati City Council.

"I would like to read a scripture from the Living Way Bible," he said. "Anyone that oppresses the poor insults God, who made them. That's chapter 14 Proverbs, the 31st verse."

Britton was among a group of activists attending the meeting to show their support for the low-income tenants of the Metropole Apartments. The tenants, some of whom also spoke at the meeting, oppose a plan by the Cincinnati Center City Development Corp. (3CDC) that will force them to move so the Metropole can be renovated and turned into a boutique hotel.

The topic of the council meeting was whether to give 3CDC and its partner, 21c Hotels, a \$2.5 million grant and a \$4.5 million loan to help fund the renovation. Also being voted on was an ordinance that would exempt 3CDC from paying property taxes on improvements to the Metropole during the renovation.

During the public forum, sides in the debate were quickly drawn. Activists spoke against the funding and the forced relocation of ten-

ants while local business praised 3CDC for its work and its approach in helping the tenants with the relocation process.

'This should enrage'

Andy Church, president of the Downtown Residents Council, said the group wants to maintain diversity downtown.

"3CDC has gone above and beyond what one would expect of many other companies pursuing a similar deal," he said. "We feel this project is a net positive for the city."

Others discussed in more detail the positive effects the city could see from the addition of the hotel.

Steve Loftin is president of the Cincinnati Arts Association, which operates the Aronoff Center across the street from the Metropole. He said he has seen the positive effect 21c has had in Louisville, where it opened a hotel in 2006.

David Ginsburg, president of Downtown Cincinnati Inc., said the hotel will help round out the "backstage entertainment" area downtown and continue the neighborhood's commercial revitalization, bringing jobs to

"I would like to read a scripture from the Living Way Bible. Anyone that oppresses the poor insults God, who made them. That's chapter 14 Proverbs, the 31st verse."
- Robert Britton

See City, p. 4

See Metropole, p. 5

By The Numbers 8

The number of years Farron Allen worked for the West Virginia Turnpike before devoting himself to art (see page 16).

None

The number of citizens allowed to speak to the Cincinnati Civil Service Commission on its policy of barring felons from city jobs (see page 1).

546

The number of scientific studies used in an analysis of the effect that faith has on the human brain (see page 11).

1,200

The number of signatures Dan La Botz obtained when he sought 500 in order to qualify for the ballot (see page 3).

2000

The year President Clinton signed an order requiring government agencies to offer services for people with limited proficiency in English (see page 7).

1967

The year Sonny Williams was sent to fight in Vietnam, after a military recruiter duped him (see page 14).

\$400

The amount a Metropole tenant receives to help move to a new apartment (see page 1).

\$2.5 million

The amount the city of Cincinnati is giving 3CDC to help kick out Metropole tenants (see page 1).

49cc

The size of the motor on Kenny Bussell's bicycle (see page 9).

1975

The year Va Vang moved from Laos to Thailand before emigrating to the United States (see page 10).

Streetwise

By GREGORY FLANNERY
EDITOR

Cincinnati Continues Attack on Charities

Never mind the foreclosure crisis, the recession, unemployment rates of 10 percent and worse. The city of Cincinnati is still determined to restrict charities and social-service agencies in its poorest neighborhood – a move that attorney Tim Burke finds mind-boggling.

“At a time when governments, businesses and individuals are facing frightening economic prospects, jobs are being lost to budget shortfalls, homeowners are losing their homes and increasingly long lines are forming at food pantries, it is difficult to understand **the city's desire to curtail social services** in the area of Cincinnati where they are needed the most, Over-the-Rhine,” Burke writes.

His criticism is part of a response to the city's effort to quash a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of a 2008 resolution by city council. The resolution, sponsored by Councilman Chris Bortz, says the “unchecked proliferation” of social-services agencies has the potential to negatively impact Over-the-Rhine.

U.S. Magistrate Timothy Black held a hearing March 5 on the city's motion to dismiss the suit, filed by the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless, Bethany House Services, Justice Watch, Joseph House, Mary Magdalene House, the Drop Inn Center, the Cincinnati Interfaith Workers' Center and seven individuals. The resolution violates the U.S. Constitution's Due Process Clause and Equal Protection Clause, infringes on free speech and is an abuse of the city's powers under state law, according to Burke.

“The resolution clearly tells plaintiff social-service agencies that they are not welcome in Over-the-Rhine, that any expansion of services or programming will be looked at with heightened scrutiny by the city of Cincinnati and that, if any excuse ‘permitted by law’ can be found to shut them down or restrict their ability to expand, then the city will do so,” Burke's response says. “Should they seek to open or expand a program selling clothing to the poor for small amounts of money or for no money at all, such a service would be viewed with a more heightened scrutiny under the resolution than if Family Dollar, with its steeply discounted prices, moved in next door.”

The city's motion argues that council's resolution hasn't been implemented yet and therefore hasn't caused any harm.

“It is odd that the plaintiffs went to the trouble to try to make a federal resolution that expressly directed the city manager to follow and pursuant to which the city manager has not even acted,” the motion says. “The lawsuit is premature. The plaintiffs have not suffered any injury.”

Nonsense, Burke says.

“If the city had declared that the excess of lawyers in the downtown area was diminishing the quality of legal services or that doctors were so concentrated on Clifton's pill hill that they were harmful to their patients, and then directed the city manager to limit their operations, as appropriate, would not the harm be clear?” he writes. “So it is here for the social-service agencies and their clients.”

Black heard oral arguments March 5. He has not yet issued his findings.

Other Madness is Under Control

The same day that the Homeless Coalition was in federal court, its executive director, Josh Spring, was in Hamilton County Municipal Court for the arraignment of Michael K. Taylor, aka Madness, charged with felonious assault. **Taylor allegedly beat Streetvibes vendor Robert Meehan** so badly that he had to be placed in a medically induced coma (see “The ‘Madness’ of Hate Downtown,” issue of Feb. 15-28). Taylor then fled to Las Vegas and was extradited to Cincinnati. He is now in jail under a \$750,000 bond pending indictment.

“Today Mr. Meehan is still recovering,” Spring says. “The bones in his face are precariously floating in place. The Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless believes that Mr. Meehan was beaten with such disregard for his life because Taylor believed he was homeless. Nationally there is a running trend of people who are homeless being attacked and often killed. The attackers believe that because the person is homeless the person does not matter and there will be no consequences for such actions.”

What if the City Helped Workers Instead?

Meehan was attacked outside the Metropole Apartments, whose new owner, the Cincinnati Center City Development Corp., is forcing out the low-income tenants in order to build a boutique hotel for tourists (see “City Council Turns back on Metropole Tenants,” page 1). That kind of economic development, with the city constantly supporting big money over working people's interests, will be the topic of an April 5 forum sponsored by **Xavier University Students for Economic Justice**. The panel's subject – “Controversial Topics in Cincinnati Urban Development” – is inspired in part by a study by Dan La Botz, Socialist candidate for an Ohio seat in the U.S. Senate (see “Maybe it's Time for a troublemaker,” page 1).

“In Cincinnati, seven dominant corporations and some other companies guide all the important civic, cultural, and social organizations of the city,” La Botz wrote. “They influence or control the boards of directors of foundations, universities, museums, and social welfare organizations. They sit on boards while community members and working people are virtually excluded from participation. Middle class and working class people have almost no role in these organizations or at best have token representation.”

The panel discussion is from 7-9 p.m. April 5 at Kelley Auditorium at Xavier University. Admission is free.

Streetvibes is an activist newspaper, advocating justice and building community. *Streetvibes* reports on economic issues, civil rights, the environment, the peace movement, spirituality and the struggle against homelessness and poverty. Distributed by people who are or once were homeless, in exchange for a \$1 donation, *Streetvibes* is published twice a month by the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless.

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Maybe it's Time for a Troublemaker

Dan La Botz runs for U.S. Senate

By GREGORY FLANNERY
Editor

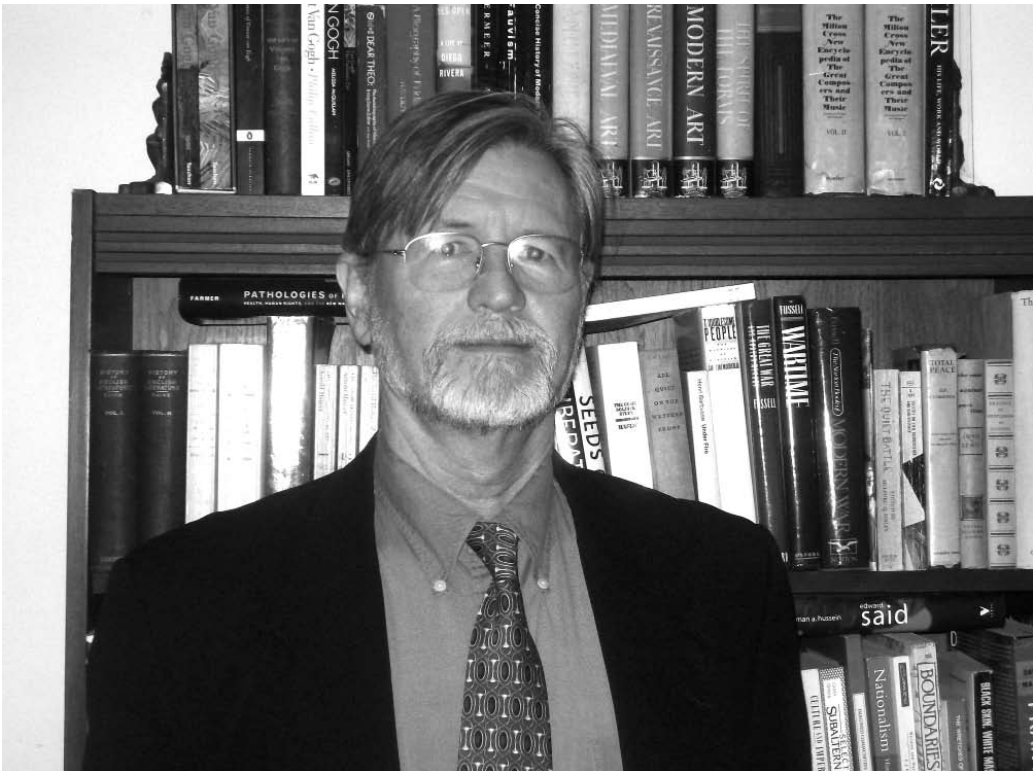
The further left one's politics goes, the more argumentative is the company he keeps. Thus while many progressives in Cincinnati might agree with Dan La Botz's policy views, he is not necessarily every local activist's favorite.

That won't faze La Botz, who brings an unusual combination of political scholarship and organizing experience to the Ohio race for U.S. Senate. A veteran of union campaigns, anti-war movements and the ongoing struggle against racism, La Botz has spent 45 years in the politics of the workplace, the ballot box and the street. Now he's making his first run for elective office, and he's doing it under the banner of a party whose very name has been used as a smear against the far more moderate views of President Obama.

La Botz is running as a member of the Socialist Party USA.

"'Socialist' has become a dirty word but it's also become an attractive word," he says.

He describes his effort to get 500 signatures to qualify for the May 4 primary election. He gathered 1,200 and has been certified for the ballot.



Dan La Botz wants to abolish corporations. Photo by Drew Goebel.

"Today the corporation, like slavery, is an institution that should be abolished. Closing a factory, destroying the economy of a town, is too important a decision to be in the hands 10 or 20 men. That is a decision society should make."

-Dan La Botz

nasty or call me names. For the first time in 45 years as an activist, I didn't have one person tell me to go back to Russia. I also had people say, 'You can't be any worse than what we have in Washington now.' Another response I got was people said, 'This is America. Everybody has the right to run for office.' Young people would turn away. They weren't interested in politics in the usual way. But then, when you said, 'Socialist candidate,' they would turn around and say, 'Here, let me sign that.' These were not people who belong to political organizations. They have come to self-identify as leftist or socialist. It had made people on the left and right think and say, 'If I want health care, I guess I'm a socialist.' "

Abolishing corporations

La Botz explains his concept of democratic socialism as a contrast to the power of corporations in the so-called "free market."

"We have several corporate headquarters downtown," he says. "Those headquarters can hold a board of directors meeting of 12 to 20, usually white men, and take a vote and decide to close a factory and put out of work an entire town. Today the corporation, like slavery, is an institution that should be abolished. Closing a factory, destroying the economy of a town, is too important a decision to be in the hands 10 or 20 men. That is a decision society should make. Skilled tradesmen, factory workers, secretaries, electricians, millwrights, accountants, advertising people – all of those people created that wealth, and that wealth should be seen as our common property."

The economic initiatives of the Bush and Obama administrations – bailing out failing mega-banks and the auto industry – primarily benefited the corporations that profit from them, according to La Botz.

"The government decided to save the auto industry," he says. "They continue to move plants abroad. Even though they have been saved, they continue to go to the workers and demand concessions in wages and health care. Let's use that money to create a kind of not-for-profit company that works for the people of Ohio. Let's build solar panels. Let's build wind energy. Let's have them use their talent to create a new industry and have that industry run democratically. ... We could build an industry, using our tax dollars under the priority of the people of our state. What would it mean to have the secretary who reads *Streetvibes* make a good living wage and have a voice in running the company? How about a world where all the clerical workers have a vote in the way the company is run?

"I don't think democratic socialism is easy. But a system in which a very few people keep all the wealth for themselves and make all the decisions is a very poor option."

La Botz opposes the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He believes Obama's continuation of those wars is causing disillusionment with his own supporters.

"It seems to me Obama must be a big disappointment to those who

"Here's the responses I got," La Botz says. "There were some people who just turned away. But I didn't have one person who got

voted for him," La Botz says. "Many people voted for Obama because they wanted to end the wars. They wanted a different foreign policy. The war has continued in Iraq. It's expanded in Afghanistan. It's expanded to Pakistan. There is a danger of war in Yemen. There is a danger of war with Iran. Obama continues the same foreign policy as Bush. These wars are not good for America. They promote terrorism."

'Fight Back'

His Senate run isn't the only new thing in La Botz's life. At age 64 he has begun learning to play guitar, a useful aid in his new job as an elementary-school Spanish teacher.

"It's challenging because it's all new," he says. "I've neither taught Spanish nor taught young children before."

An adjunct professor of U.S. history at the University of Cincinnati, La Botz has also taught at Miami University and Northern Kentucky University. He is the author of books on the history of labor unions, Mexico and Indonesia, including *Rank and File Rebellion* and *A Troublemaker's Handbook: How to Fight Back Where You Work – And Win!*

La Botz has a history of working with successful coalitions. He is a member of Cincinnati Progressive Action, which worked with the Cincinnati Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to defeat a tax to build a new jail in Hamilton County. When voters defeated the tax, the county commissioners ignored the election and imposed the tax anyway. La Botz and his allies then organized to overturn it, and won again.

In 2001 La Botz was active in the March 4 Justice, a large, non-violent movement against police violence after a Cincinnati Police officer killed an unarmed African-American teenager wanted on traffic citations.

Although he is all but certain to win the Socialist Party primary – he is the only candidate on the ballot – he is more realistic about the general election in November. He recently spoke to a class at Seven Hills High School.

"One of the students said, 'Why would you do this when you know you can't win?' It seems to me the reason is to present an alternative and to network across the state and put people in touch with each other and kind of encourage people to fight back," La Botz says. "The reason for doing this is there's such incredible disenchantment with the government and political parties."

"My goal right now is to reach out to people across the state to create a political movement. I'm trying to reach out to people who belong to the faith community, people who belong to labor unions and young activists. I'm not going to be able to cover every precinct in the state but I think we can have a presence in all the larger cities. I would like this to be the kind of campaign that gives expression to the workers' concerns."

"My goal right now is to reach out to people across the state to create a political movement. I'm trying to reach out to people who belong to the faith community, people who belong to labor unions and young activists."

-Dan LaBotz

City Ignores Plea for Fair Hiring

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

chanting in these hallways! This is a workplace, not a place of protest. If you need to sing, you'll go outside where you need to be."

JohnsonGrove spoke up.

"You have a First Amendment right to say what you need to say," he reminded the group. "Please don't be dissuaded."

At 9:15 a.m., when the commission opened the meeting room doors, over 50 Cincinnati citizens tried to squeeze inside. Half fit into the room, while others filled the outside hallway.

"Ain't council chambers the people's house?" asked coalition member Marjorie Moseley.

Inside the crowded meeting room, Fair Hiring Campaign organizers Pastor Troy Jackson and JohnsonGrove negotiated for two

minutes of speaking time with the commission. Jackson, of University Christian Church, an AMOS Project congregation, spoke first.

"Jesus was a felon," he said. "Moses murdered a man. Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul and James all spent time in prison. Jesus was a convicted criminal when he went to the cross. Our faith teaches us that people with criminal records should not be forever condemned."

JohnsonGrove also spoke.

"The current policy of barring all former offenders is wooden, rigid, one-size fits all, and we need a fairer way forward," he said. "We're not asking for guaranteed jobs. We just want fair consideration for people with old and irrelevant criminal records."

"Jesus was a felon. Moses murdered a man. Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, Peter, Paul and James all spent time in prison. Jesus was a convicted criminal when he went to the cross. Our faith teaches us that people with criminal records should not be forever condemned."
- Pastor Troy Jackson

The commission gave no reply. Others who wished to speak were not permitted.

"If people have meaningful jobs, they tend to become productive members of society," said Sheila Donaldson-Johnson, a rehabilitated former offender who would have spoken during the open forum. "Being able to support your family makes all the difference in the world."

From the third-floor meeting room, the crowd migrated downstairs to the mayor's office to deliver over 1,000 letters of support, encouraging the city to change its hiring policy.

Descending City Hall's marble steps past the stained glass windows, coalition members sang, "It's my brother and my sister and it's me, Oh Lord, standing in the need of jobs! It's we, it's we, it's we, Oh Lord, standing in the need of jobs!"

No one was arrested or asked to leave.

The mayor's office had locked its doors and police officers blocked the entrance.

"Are you saying that the mayor doesn't want to hear from us?" JohnsonGrove asked the officers, loud enough for the assembly to hear.

Antoine replied that Mallory wasn't in.

"Are you saying that no one from the mayor's staff wants to hear from us?" JohnsonGrove said.

The doors opened.

JohnsonGrove presented the letters in stacks of a hundred, followed by organizational letters of support from multiple religious congregations, Talbert House, the Urban League, Cincinnati State Community and Technical College and the law offices of former Hamilton County Prosecutor Michael Allen and former Cincinnati Mayor David Mann.

The crowd shuffled out to the City Hall steps, while police officers pulled the organizers aside.

Standing on the City Hall steps moments later, Pastor Gregory Chandler, president of the AMOS Project, told the coalition that the police officers said that their gathering had been illegal.

"I thought it was a public building!" someone cried out.

"Not too public," called another.

Chandler rallied the group.

"We thank them for the opportunity to have this discourse," he said.

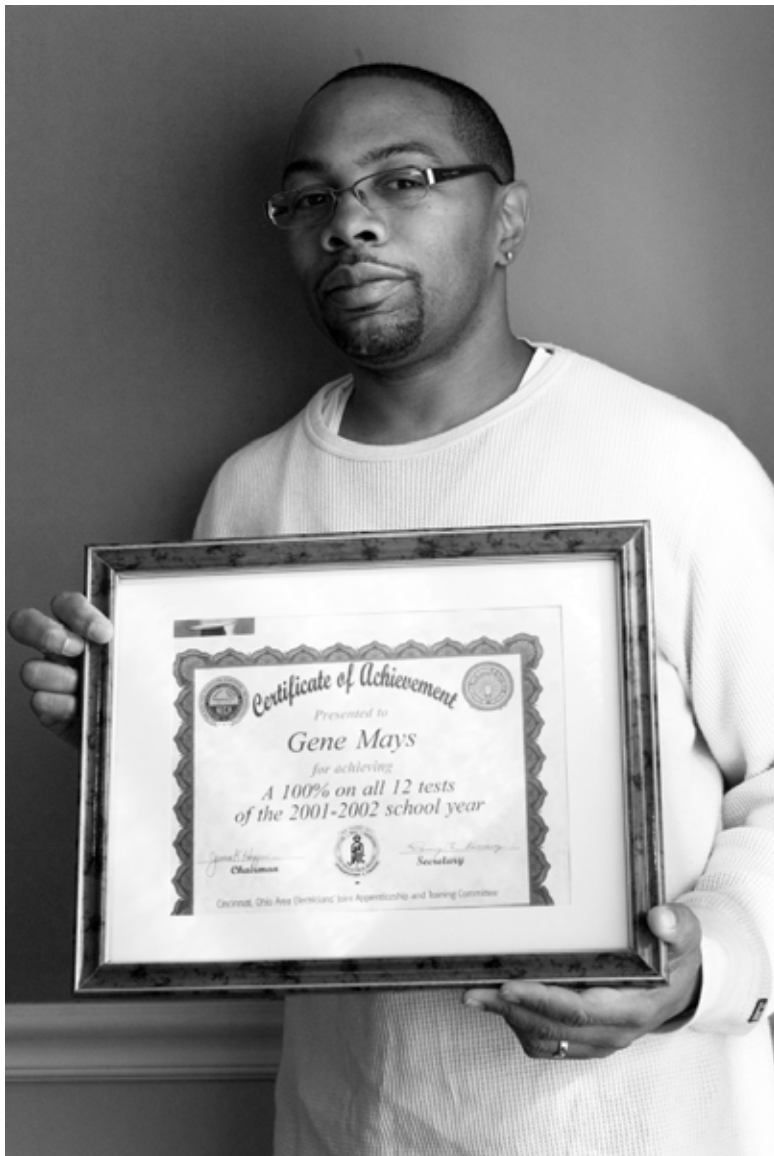
Elsewhere he explained his opposition to the city's policy.

"Treating folks who have turned their lives around like pariahs damages them and it damages all of us. ... The city's no-felon rule violates our fundamental values, damages struggling families, and tears at the fabric of our society," Chandler said.

Second chances

The letters that the Fair Hiring Campaign presented to the mayor's office encouraged the city to adopt guidelines to help determine whether an individual with a felony record should be hired.

The city could consider the gravity of the offense, the age of the applicant at the time of the offense, the time elapsed, the relevance



The dispute over the city's ban on hiring former felony offenders started when Gene Mays was denied employment for a 15-year-old drug conviction. Photo by Calvin Chen.

of the offense to the duties of the present job and evidence of rehabilitation.

But the city jettisons such nuance in categorically barring people with irrelevant and seemingly ancient criminal records. These restrictions hinder the ability of former offenders to successfully reintegrate after completing their sentences. By condemning rehabilitated people to unemployment and under-employment, the no-felon hiring policy ends up increasing the burden on the city's own overloaded criminal justice and public welfare systems.

Gene Mays, profiled in Nov. 1, 2009, of *Streetvibes*, was one such candidate for city employment. Mays ranked first in his class all five years of his union apprenticeship and is by all accounts a supremely qualified electrician. The commission saw extensive evidence of his rehabilitation from his nonviolent 13- and 19-year-old drug felonies, but concluded anyway that "he had a couple of felony convictions on his record, and could therefore not be hired for city employment."

Their assessment came in spite of the mayor's claim that the city doesn't bar former offenders from city jobs. The city's law department fought Mays's appeal to the Ohio Supreme Court.

Advocates explain that after a certain period of time, someone with a criminal record is at no greater risk of offending than a same-aged counterpart who has never offended. Researchers confirmed that fact in a May 2009 study in the journal *Criminology*. For example, they found that for 18-year-olds arrested for burglary in 1980, that period was 7.7 years. Yet people convicted of crimes far less serious than robbery needlessly face job barriers decades later.

The no-felon hiring policy is based on fear, not evidence. Far from making our communities safer, job restrictions serve to punish people with old criminal records years after they have paid their debt to society. They also apparently serve the interests of a duplicitous mayor who preaches a message of second chances that his own administration demonstrably ignores.

His obfuscation thwarts not just the media's responsibility to report honestly, but the efforts of rehabilitated people seeking to serve their families and, in spite of their mayor, their city.

"Treating folks who have turned their lives around like pariahs damages them and it damages all of us. ... The city's no-felon rule violates our fundamental values, damages struggling families, and tears at the fabric of our society,"
- Pastory Gregory Chandler

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More Trouble Ahead for Haiti

Only plastic between Haiti's homeless and the coming storms



A tent erected over the remains of a house in Port-au-Prince. *REUTERS/Carlos Barria.*

By **OLESYA DMITRACOVA**
STREET NEWS SERVICE

London, England – Seasonal rains and hurricanes spell trouble for Haiti in the best of times, but with hundreds of thousands of people living in flimsy makeshift shelters after January's earthquake, this year the dangers are much greater.

The rainy season begins in earnest in early April and the hurricane season in early June, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Both can be deadly.

"If a hurricane hits Haiti head on, the loss of life will be severe, and every temporary housing camp will be wiped out," Cameron Sinclair, co-founder of non-profit design and building group Architecture for Humanity, wrote in a blog.

Margareta Wahlstrom, U.N. Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva, offers a similar warning for the Haitian capital.

It bore the brunt of the January 12 earthquake, which has killed up to 300,000 people.

"Port-au-Prince is built on vulnerable small slopes and mountains," she told Reuters AlertNet. "With the rains, these slopes start softening up and cause mudslides like we have seen in the past, causing schools to collapse and more deaths."

A series of storms in Haiti in 2008 already showed the extent of damage they can cause, even to sturdy buildings. More than 800 people were killed, and nearly 1 million left homeless or in dire need of help.

Haiti is extremely vulnerable to floods and mudslides because most of its

hillsides have been stripped bare.

Cutting down trees to make charcoal to sell for fuel is a last resort for many rural Haitians who have no other income between harvests.

There is no talk in the Haiti aid community of building enough durable housing before the storms start and no mention so far of evacuation plans in case of floods or mudslides.

"We have a huge challenge in terms of just providing emergency shelter – something that we feel that, if we put all of our weight behind, as we are doing right now, we will be able (to do)," said Kristen Knutson, a spokeswoman for the U.N. office that is coordinating the international relief effort, in a telephone interview from Haiti.

She added that aid groups were for now focusing on providing plastic shelter materials to earthquake survivors and that more robust housing would be needed in the longer-term.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), which is coordinating all shelter-related aid work in Haiti, is so far building only one model transitional house and hopes construction of more houses will begin before the rainy season.

'Minimal Protection'

Beyond distributing waterproof shelter materials, aid agencies are also working to improve sanitation and health care – all essential in wet conditions which help infections spread.

Neither tents nor tarpaulins, however, will provide more than minimal protection from the Haitian rainy season which peaks in May, when Port-au-Prince gets an average 230 mm of rain and sometimes as much as 50 mm in two hours.

The hurricane season, which begins later in the year, is of special concern," IFRC said in a statement.

When asked for more information, including on evacuation plans, an IFRC spokesman in Haiti declined to comment further.

The WMO has also been asking Haitian authorities and some aid agencies on the ground whether it would be possible to anticipate floods and move the displaced people – many of whom have camped out in low-lying planes and near the sea – to safer ground, said Maryam Golnaraghi, who heads the disaster risk-reduction program at the U.N. weather body.

"I do not know the answer to that," she told Reuters AlertNet.

Before any evacuation can begin, reliable and consistent forecasts of extreme weather must reach the government and relief groups quickly.

In Haiti, that is difficult, as the earthquake shattered its weather stations; and now several countries are supplying meteorological information to the country.

To prevent any confusion, the WMO is working with Haiti's authorities to ensure that all weather forecasts are channeled through Haiti's single official meteorological service.

Another challenge is disseminating the information, now that only a fifth of all media in Haiti are working, Golnaraghi said.

As those aims are achieved one by one, Haiti will become better prepared for the stormy season. But time is short and the number of people at risk enormous.

"We recognize that this is minimal perfection," said Knutson from the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Photo courtesy of Reuters. © Street News Service: www.street-papers.org

Go Ahead: Ask a Vendor

Invitation to a dialogue with our readers

Streetvibes vendors see a lot that you might not. For example, some can describe what goes on in an abandoned building at night when they sleep there.

Have you ever wondered what it's like to stand on a street corner selling newspapers? That's hardly a common occupation anymore.

How much money do *Streetvibes* vendors make – and what do they do with it? Do they have other jobs?

If you have questions, some of our vendors would like to answer them. "Go Ahead: Ask a Vendor" will be an occasional feature, with questions submitted by readers and answered by *Streetvibes* vendors.

You may direct your question to a specific vendor or we'll invite one to respond. Only include your name if you want to.

Send questions to streetvibes2@yahoo.com
Or to Streetvibes, 117 E. 12th St. Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.

Go ahead. Ask.

Once Upon a Time: Access Justice

Ohio courts translate forms for immigrants

By ANNE SKOVE
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When my great-grandmother was 14, she left her family in Eastern Europe, boarded a boat and ended up in Cleveland by way of Baltimore. She had a job, owned property, gave birth to children and got married as often as the Wife of Bath. Every year she renewed her green card. And she loved The Three Stooges – physical comedy that appeals to everyone, no matter what language they speak. You don't need to translate a pie in the face.

Most people can tell a similar a family story. Eventually, we go all Borg-like and assimilate. We learn to speak impeccable English – my great-grandmother and grandmother made sure their secret language wasn't passed down through the generations. Meanwhile the federal government – not unlike Moe and friends – remains accessible to everyone, whatever their level of English.

President Clinton signed Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency," in 2000. Along with the Department of Justice's Enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – National Origin Discrimination Against Persons With Limited English Proficiency, it required federal agencies to "prepare a plan to improve access to its federally conducted programs and activities by eligible LEP persons."

These documents follow our country's longstanding tradition of

These documents follow our country's longstanding tradition of welcoming immigrants by ensuring that the federal government and agencies receiving federal assistance are accessible to people with limited English proficiency (LEP).

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with limited English proficiency (LEP).

Last fall at the Ohio Judicial Conference, "the DOJ reminded attendees of their obligations regarding language access and compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act," says Bruno Romero, manager of the Supreme Court of Ohio Interpreter Services Program. This obligation led to the translation of court documents.

With a grant from the Ohio State Bar Foundation grant, the Supreme Court of Ohio funded the translation project. Certain court forms are now available in the five most-requested languages: Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, Somali and Spanish. Twenty-seven different instructional forms were selected for translation. They include waivers of rights, forms relating to juvenile court and forms relating to domestic violence issues.

"Often, interpreters, particularly unqualified interpreters, summarize, omit or misinterpret documents, principally when the documents have to be sight-translated on the spot," Romero says. "By having these documents, courts can avoid the consequences of mistranslated statements or misunderstood instructions."

The problem that has plagued courts is: How much knowledge of English is enough? There is no test, and it can be difficult to as-



The Ohio Supreme Court building in Columbus, Ohio.

sess just how much a person understands.

Tools have been created to help identify people with limited English skills and their respective needs. Law enforcement can use the "I Speak ..." cards, a list of languages from Arabic to Zulu used to help communicate with victims, witnesses and others who might come into contact with the criminal justice system. A bench card, "Working with Foreign Language Interpreters in the Courtroom," is available to help judges decide whether an interpreter is needed and to help determine interpreter qualifications.

The translated forms are yet another nail in the LEP toolbox.

"Greater access to the courts comes from having parties obtain these forms in their own language, ideally before coming to the court," Romero says. "Even if parties do not have the forms beforehand, if they receive them at the time of their appearance, they can follow along and not only hear but also read important information. This, we believe, creates greater access."

In 1860 there were 328,249 immigrants in Ohio, representing 14 percent of the state's population. According to ohiohistorycentral.org, "Signs in (Lancaster, Ohio) were printed in both English and German. By 1809 a German-language newspaper, Der Ohio Adler, began to be published. Cincinnati and Cleveland Germans also established their own German-language newspapers. ... Over-the-Rhine emerged as an important center of German immigrant culture. The neighborhood had its own churches, clubs, and German-language newspapers."

We still enjoy many of these "immigrant" traditions today – May Festival, Oktoberfest, Bockfest (sort of the Hallmark holiday of the bunch). Why else would we eat goetta?

Access to government is for everyone. Our ancestors would be proud.

See more Ohio immigrant history at www.ohiohistorycentral.org.

For information about the state supreme court's Interpreter Services Program, contact Program Manager Bruno Romero at 614-387-9404 or visit <http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/interpreterSvcs/default.asp>. The forms are online at <http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/interpreterSvcs/forms/default.asp>. Want to be a court interpreter? Visit <http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/interpreterSvcs/calendar/default.asp>.

"Often, interpreters, particularly unqualified interpreters, summarize, omit or misinterpret documents, principally when the documents have to be sight-translated on the spot. By having these documents, courts can avoid the consequences of mistranslated statements or misunderstood instructions."
-Bruno Romero

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Sexy, Yummy, Veggie

Your tour guide into the steamy side of vegetarian cuisine

By ALECIA A. LOTT
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Eating according to the seasons is a big thing these days, as it should be. Everyone from nutritionists to environmentalists tell us that, because it's March, we should load our grocery carts with carrots, Brussels sprouts and beets. Yes, food is more nutritious, better for the environment and tastes better when eaten fresh and picked during the season in which it was naturally meant to be harvested. There, I said it.

But lately, during this harsh winter when I should be looking for stew recipes, my tummy's been craving summer foods like tomatoes and okra. Now don't get me wrong, I would never buy a fresh tomato in March in Cincinnati. I'd rather eat Styrofoam. Canned tomatoes, however, are always a star in my pantry, regardless of the weather.



Photo by Alecia A. Lott

They're OK, right? Surely no one would object to frozen sliced okra – or, as I like to call them, green pentagons of happiness. Although their annual time in the spotlight as a New Year's Eve symbol of prosperity is over, black-eyed peas are still aces to me. I like to get dried ones and cook them myself, but the canned ver-

sion is good as well. Put them all together with couscous, a teeny-tiny pasta that cooks in literally 3-5 minutes tops, and what do you have? Ta-da, a lazy, politically incorrect meal that will keep the chill off your bones. But don't tell the food police. Let's be naughty together!

Easy Black-Eyed Peas, Okra, and Tomatoes with Couscous

Serves 2

- 2 cups black-eyed peas, cooked and drained (or 1 15-oz can, drained)
- 1 15-oz can diced tomatoes, with juice
- 12 oz. frozen sliced okra
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tsp. red pepper flakes
- 3-4 drops liquid smoke
- Salt to taste
- 1 cup couscous
- 1 cup water
- 1 tsp. olive oil
- Lemon juice (optional)

1. Combine the first seven ingredients in a saucepan, cover and bring to a rapid boil. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, until couscous is done.
2. In a second pan, boil water. Add olive oil and couscous, stir quickly and cover. Remove from heat. Let sit for five minutes.
3. Fluff couscous with a fork. Served topped with tomato mixture. For added zing, squeeze a little lemon juice on top.

Alecia Lott also writes for her food and travel blog, Bang-Bang's Quest for Yay, Yum and Yes. Visit <http://bangbangquest.wordpress.com>

Artwork By Anthony Williams



Say What?!

“Development should be viewed as a human rights issue, not as a question of simply increasing the gross national product (GNP). When the national economy picks up, the situation of the poor is not necessarily improved. Therefore development should be redefined. It should refer only to a positive measurable change in per capita income of the bottom 50 percent of the population.”
- Muhammad Yunus
Banker to the Poor: Micro-lending and the battle against world poverty

You Can't Keep a Vendor Down

Kenny Bussell sells 'Streetvibes' and tomatoes

By GREGORY FLANNERY
EDITOR

Lack of transportation keeps many *Streetvibes* vendors from taking the paper to other neighborhoods. But Kenny Bussell isn't one of them.

Bussell, 49, is one of the few vendors who sell *Streetvibes* in Northern Kentucky. He gets from Covington, where he lives, to Over-the-Rhine, where he picks up copies of the paper, via a bicycle. But his is no ordinary bike. Bussell rigged it with a 49cc Honda motor.

"I put it on in about 45 minutes," he says. "I've been taking it wide open ever since."

The motor gets 100 miles per gallon of gas. Bussell could go 28 miles per hour when the motor was new. It's no longer new, however. The clutch is going out, he says. He hopes his next motor will be chain-driven. His friction-drive motor doesn't work when it rains.

"When it gets wet, I can't get around," he says.

Don't expect those kinds of obstacles to keep Bussell from getting around. Selling *Streetvibes* for the

past four months is just the latest way he has adapted to challenges in life.

Originally from Carlisle, Ky., where he grew up on a racehorse farm, he has lived in this area for the past 25 years.

"I became a truck driver when I turned 21 and drove a truck for about 15 years," Bussell says. "I enjoyed it but I don't have very much education so it knocked me out of the ballgame. You've got to be able to read road signs and read them pretty fast."

In addition to selling *Streetvibes*, Bussell is an urban gardener, growing tomatoes where he can and selling them to local restaurants. He got started three years ago when he encountered Brenda Zachmeister, owner of Morning Glory Bed And Breakfast, outside one day.

"She was out there one day deciding what to do with her empty lot," Bussell says. "I asked her if I could grow tomatoes. She said, 'I'm a vegetarian and I think that would work pretty well.'"

The result is a community garden, with one plot for Morning



Kenny Bussell. Photo by Lynne Ausman.

Glory, one for Bussell and four or five plots rented by others. In fact, the garden has experienced some unwanted popularity.

"It's been like a guerilla garden," Bussell says. "Anybody could take anything. This year we're going to get a fence around it."

But vegetable pilferers aren't the only people who have noticed. A lawyer in Covington lets Bussell use an empty lot on Russell Street to grow vegetables, and he has asked the city for permission to grow on empty lots that it owns.

"They like the idea and they're going to work with me," Bussell says. "They've got a bunch of plants they can give me and a few tools."

Last year Bussell grew 120 tomato plants. He is aiming even higher this year, hoping to find more lots to cultivate and hire others to work with him.

"I should be able to put this together and put people to work, too," he says. "I've got two or three homeless people who do odd jobs. If we work together, we won't go hungry."

Bussell's entrepreneurial spirit doesn't mean his problems are over, however.

"I've got a roof over my head right now," he says. "My brother's in the process of remodeling a house right now. As soon as he's done and it's sold, I'll be back out on the streets. I just go from friend's to friend's. I don't care for shelters. I need to get where I can get some housing."

If you have vacant land that you'd like to let for vegetable gardening, or if you own a restaurant and would like to donate vegetable waste for composting, call Bussell at 859-652-8904.



Bussell advertises that he sells *Streetvibes* on the front of his bike.

Photo by Lynne Ausman.

Half for a Half



Throughout the month of March, Klosterman Baking Company will donate one half loaf of bread to the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless for every half loaf sold.

Pick up a coupon for Klosterman Bread at www.facebook.com/klostermanbakingcompany

Every Woman a Road Warrior

New anthology is a travelogue of women’s lives

By GREGORY FLANNERY
EDITOR

I’ve never been a woman and never owned a truck, and I have enough lingering sexist prejudice that I’m still surprised when I see a woman driving one. That said, a truck might have been the perfect cover illustration for *When One Door Closes: Reflections from Women on Life’s Turning Points*.

Trucks figure prominently in two of the 56 essays that make up this powerful anthology. One author credits a garbage truck that crashed into her car with leading her to a career of religious ministry. Another author describes the murder of her daughter by an estranged husband, who first rammed her car with his truck and then shot her as she dangled upside-down, suspended by a seat belt.

This diverse collection traverses the winding roadway from tragedy to triumph and all points in between in the lives of women. Edited by Terri Spahr Nelson, a clinical social worker in Oxford, Ohio, *When One Door Closes* does not settle for blithe happy endings but relates the hard-earned wisdom of women who have encountered detours, road closings and potholes and sometimes run out of gas on their journeys.

Readers will know from the start that this is no *Chicken Soup for the Soul* takeoff. The first essay is by a woman married to a female-to-male transsexual, frustrated that so many questions about their relationship are merely anatomical. Another author talks about her four marriages. Yet another describes herself as happily married but unable to escape the feelings she has for another man.

Spahr Nelson has organized the essays into chapters that capture some of the complexity of women’s lives – marriage and divorce, parenting, abuse, illness, addiction, finding one’s identity, careers and death. Death makes many appearances.

“I’m Here,” by Alice Coggin Bagley, caught me off guard. Her account of her friend’s dying day is excruciating. Bagley had the unhappy task of helping her friend’s family prepare for the death – a task I had in the case of both my parents but which didn’t affect me in the gut-wrenching way this essay did.

In “Paula,” Vickie Andresen Sedillo discusses the suicide of her schizophrenic mother: “By the time the news came that Mom had died, she had been dead for years. Not her body, but whatever it was deep inside her that made her my mother was long dead.” As if to drive home the point, the mother’s body lay undiscovered for two months in her apartment in the Arizona desert. To Sedillo and her friend fell the odiferous task of clean-

ing up afterward.

“We did it all in one day, with no help from the men,” Sedillo writes. “This is not to say that the guys wouldn’t have helped, had we asked them to help us. Uncle Johnny, however, had gone an eloquent shade of green the first time he smelled the papers that Paula and I carried through the house.”

Other kinds of loss can be equally grievous. One author comes to terms with learning that she must carry her dead fetus to delivery for several weeks, only to have her husband make sexual overtures a few days later. Another writer, Erin Wilson, is shocked by the idiotic comment of a doctor who refuses to perform a vasectomy on her young husband because his “next wife” might want children.

But Wilson’s essay, like others in this book, isn’t without humor – though in the case of her essay, “Biology,” some of the laughs might be best appreciated by women. Wilson describes the pre-surgical preparation for the vasectomy – “his rooster plucked of every last feather, head bowed in reverence to the upcoming chop.” In “Shopping in the Sperm Aisle,” Rebecca J. Love reveals that an extra \$85 will pay for the seed of a donor who has a Ph.D.

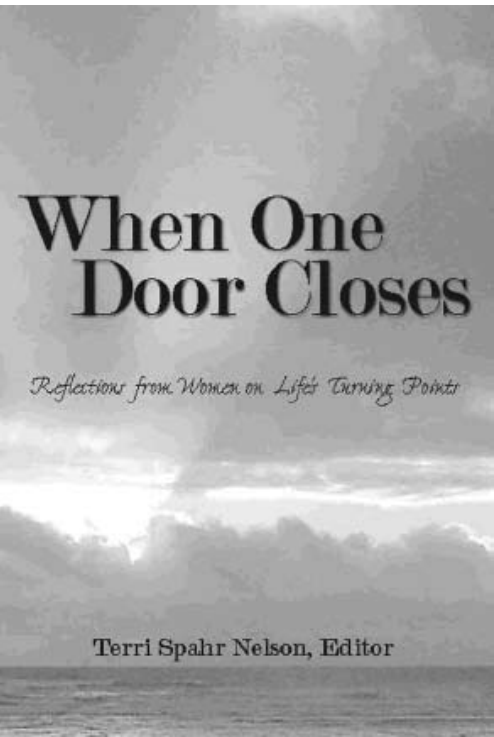
Seemingly minor events can prove life-altering. In “Ending the Tyranny of ‘Supposed To,’” Margo Pierce – a contributing writer for *Streetvibes* – describes the awakening she experienced when she put canisters on her kitchen counter-top. It was an act of rebellion against a domineering husband. But it was the reaction by Pierce’s sister that made the author realize that something in her marriage was terribly wrong.

After each chapter, Spahr Nelson lists “Reflection Points,” and she closes the book with “Lessons Learned.” These are helpful and un-intrusive but sometimes unnecessary. The authors do a fine job of drawing the lessons on their own.

In “Winter Solstice,” Karen Ander Francis notes, “Resentment is like taking poison and expecting the other person to die.”

“A New Challenge” by Va Vang, who moved in 1975 from Laos to Thailand and then to the United States, best sums up the book’s theme: “No one really knows what life might throw at us. One day we think that life will be the same and we will be doing the same thing all our lives. Then change strikes without warning.”

Spahr Nelson is donating 35 percent of profits from *When One Door Closes* to charities: the Global Fund for Women; the Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network; the Beginning Over Foundation; the Washington Area Women’s Foundation; and Women’s Legal Resource. To order a copy, visit sugatipublications.com.



Readers will know from the start that this is no *Chicken Soup for the Soul* takeoff. The first essay is by a woman married to a female-to-male transsexual, frustrated that so many questions about their relationship are merely anatomical. Another author talks about her four marriages. Yet another describes herself as happily married but unable to escape the feelings she has for another man.

Want more Streetvibes? Check out the **STREETVIBES BLOG**
<http://streetvibes.wordpress.com>

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The Chemistry of Faith

Neuro-science studies religion’s effect on the brain

By JEREMY FLANNERY
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

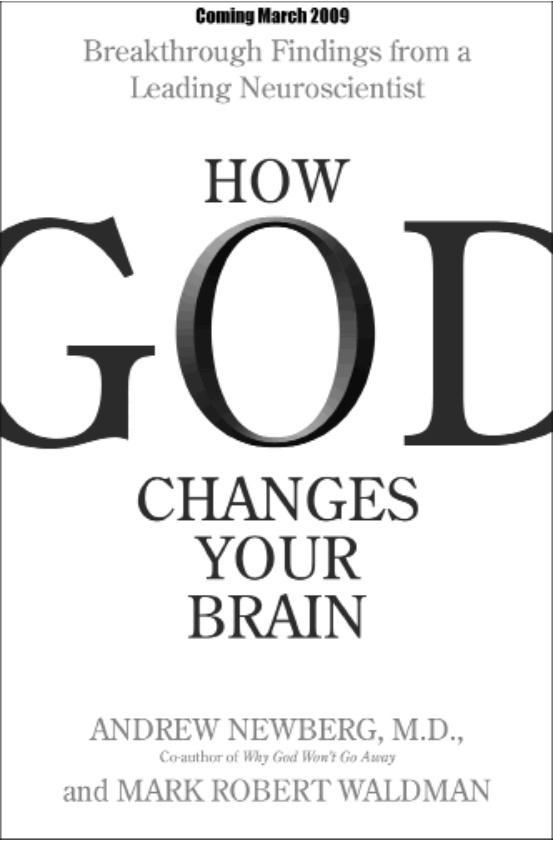
Do you believe God exists? Whether or not She is with us, our brains crave faith exercised through prayer or meditation and discussion, according to neuroscientist Andrew Newberg, M.D. and Mark Robert Waldman, an associate fellow of the University of Pennsylvania. The two authors of *How God Changes Your Brain* do not assert correctness for any ideology. Newberg writes he is open to the possibility of God’s existence while Waldman chooses to view the universe through evidence. I prefer an agnostic mesh that borrows benevolent facets of the monotheisms and Buddhism. The book provides scientific evidence that suggests personal perspectives of faith are more complex than such labels as Hasidic Jew, Sunni Muslim and Methodist Christian; and certainty about faith eludes us, even atheists.

Yawning, the fifth best way, is the best-kept secret for maintaining a healthy brain, the authors write. Smile at the idea and try it. The authors say the act improves alertness, memory recall, voluntary control and temperature regulation, and it helps us relax and focus before taking on physical or mental tasks.

“Ultimately, it is a mistake to assume that any self-assigned label, category or description of religious belief accurately captures a person’s value system or morality,” the authors write. “Furthermore, our research suggests that the more a person contemplates his or her values and beliefs, the more they are apt to change.” The authors sought to study how faith neurologically affects the human brain and how views of God compare among various groups. So they ventured into the minds of Americans who participated in surveys to offer their personal perspectives of God. Participants drew pictures of God and described how God feels along with other surveys for the authors to mold an anatomical explanation of how people perceive God through the human senses. The majority of respondents expressed benevolent views of God as an abstract notion beyond their ability to fully comprehend. Also, the religious demographic in the United States is shifting from religious denomina-

tions to individualized spiritual practices. The authors’ research suggests that God in the minds of Americans faces an identity crisis: He might be She or neuter, loving, commanding, caring, damning or non-existent. Young children tend to see God as anthropomorphic, they write. As our young brains develop, especially the frontal lobe, which is attributed toward logic and critical thinking, we begin to see God as more of an abstract notion and sometimes shed religious instructions to establish personal beliefs, they write. The authors used brain scans to see what parts of the brain become active during meditation or prayer. They scanned the brains of people who meditate or pray for about an hour each day to compare to those who do not by asking them to pray or meditate for 12 minutes. The results show that those who pray or meditate daily have decreased activity in their parietal lobes, the portion of the brain associated with concern for the ego.

Religious fundamentalism is not a neurological pathogen sparking theistic violence, according to the authors. They write that, if the focus is positive, such beliefs can cause beneficial effects in the human brain. Fear of an angry god and resentment and anger toward infidels, however, cause brain damage by releasing destructive neuro-chemicals into the brain. “Anger interrupts the functioning of your frontal lobes,” the authors write. “Not only do you lose the ability to be rational, you lose the awareness that you’re acting in an irrational way. When your frontal lobes shut down, it’s impossible to listen to the other person, let alone feel empathy or compassion.” But the authors offer brain exercises and meditation techniques to alleviate such negative thoughts. They offer their “eight best ways to exercise your brain.” “Neuro-scientific evidence has governed our choice in selecting the eight best ways to maintain a healthy brain,” they write. The list might be surprising. Repetitive smiling is the eighth best way to enhance your brain as it helps to maintain a positive outlook. Staying intellectually active ranks seventh. “This should be (if you will pardon the pun) a no-brainer,” they write. “When it comes to the dendrites and axons that connect one neuron to thousands of others, if you don’t use it, you will lose it.” Consciously relaxing with pleasant music,



meditating for 12 minutes per day, engaging in aerobic exercise and participating in meaningful discussions also rank upon their list. Yawning, the fifth best way, is the best-kept secret for maintaining a healthy brain, the authors write. Smile at the idea and try it. The authors say the act improves alertness, memory recall, voluntary control and temperature regulation, and it helps us relax and focus before taking on physical or mental tasks. The authors consider faith to be the best way to exercise your brain because it drives us to believe in ourselves and maintain an optimistic approach toward life. Is it possible to perform all eight activities together? The authors don’t say, but an attempt seems like a healthful challenge. The book is a cornerstone for studying how certain activities positively or negatively affect your mind and ways to enhance your brain’s health and vitality. If you’re interested in understanding your own brain more, the authors cite 546 scientific studies related to their research. The most inspiring information in *How God Changes Your Brain* is that we can generate new brain cells, we can reroute our neurological circuitry toward more compassion and optimism and we can understand the written results of neuro-scientific research. The proof? I grasped it, and I’m an idiot.

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Typecasting Jim Tarbell

Plays a dummy at
League of Women Voters roast

By JESSE CALL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The League of Women Voters of the Cincinnati Area celebrated 90 years of political activism Feb. 27 at its annual Susan B. Anthony Dinner by taking jabs at Cincinnati politicians.

Former Cincinnati Mayor Jerry Springer, now a tabloid talk show host, emceed the event, in which Republican Hamilton County Clerk of Courts Patricia Clancy, Democratic judicial candidate Dan Donnellon and Jim Tarbell, a Charter Party candidate for Hamilton County Commissioner and former Cincinnati vice mayor, were roasted.

Mayor Mark Mallory was originally scheduled to be roasted, but was replaced by Donnellon when Mallory did not attend.

Among the highlights of the evening was the response by Donnellon, a former stand-up comedian, to his roasting. Donnellon cracked jokes about Springer and his hosting the second season of the television show, *America's Got Talent*. The winner in that season was a ventriloquist and impressionist. Donnellon apparently doesn't have a high regard for ventriloquism, which he referred to as "doing singing impressions with puppets."

Donnellon then called Tarbell to the podium and used him as a dummy. Placing his hand on Tarbell's back, Donnellon impersonated Louie Armstrong singing "What a Wonderful World" as Tarbell colorfully pretended to be performing.

"Jerry!" Donnellon said. "That's not talent, people!"

Donnellon also said that one lesson he learned when going into politics was to "bear an odd resemblance to Mr. Clean" in order to get the Procter and Gamble vote, a clear jab at Tarbell's bald head.

Another highlight was when Tarbell finished his response by playing harmonica for the audience. The towering mural of Tarbell in Over-the-Rhine came up when Clancy said she feels safe in Over-the-Rhine.

"The scariest thing I ever saw in Over-the-Rhine is that painting of Jim Tarbell," she said.

The mural has been a subject of controversy in Over-the-Rhine. Residents were not asked for input before the mural was painted, and there are differing views on whether Tarbell is a hero or villain in the community (see "Gigantic Insult? Towering Tribute?," issue of Jan. 1-14).

Many have accused Tarbell of backing gentrification, driving out the residents of the community in order

to make it more appealing to people with higher incomes. Tarbell was an ardent foe of the late Buddy Gray, founder of the Drop Inn Center and the Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless.



Jim Tarbell.

After the event, Springer said he didn't mind the jabs he received. A week prior to hosting the League of Women Voters dinner, he hosted *WWE Raw*, a popular wrestling program on TV, but said that "people here have more teeth."

Springer also shared his perspective on how homelessness has changed in the years since he was Cincinnati mayor.

"It's getting better," he said. "We're not there yet. And particularly in tough economic times, people become less worried about taking care of each other and more about taking care of themselves. We see that with the health care. You become so blasé about it, and that scares me. I hope we aren't losing our compassion."

Springer said he was unsure whether he would get involved in Cincinnati politics again, saying he still had it in his system but that he doesn't need a job. When voters prepare for elections, the League of Women Voters is a better source of information than the news media, he said.

"As cable news has become so obviously more partisan on both sides, there are more and more people that just want the straight scoop where they don't feel there is going to be a bias even if there wasn't one," Springer said. "As we get closer to elections, more and more people are asking, 'Where can we go to find out basic information on these people?' ... This is where the league can do great work."

Although the issue of homelessness didn't come up during the roast, the league's monthly publication, *The Voter*, features homelessness and its impact on the community. League President Alice Schneider discussed the issue in her letter to readers, sharing an experience at a discussion group of women at the Drop Inn Center.

"One left because of abuse," Schneider wrote. "Another found herself without the means to stay in her home after her husband died. Another was recovering from drug and alcohol abuse and was trying to stay sober. One talked about how the FBI was tracking her down – we guessed that mental illness might be a partial reason for her homelessness. The stories were all different but the one thing that was the same was that they were homeless now and needed a place to stay."

Let me Explain

Helping you understand me

By LARRY GROSS
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I've been a writer in Cincinnati for over 12 years now, and I'm aware that a lot of you still haven't quite figured me out. Perhaps as a public service, I'd like to explain why I am the way I am and maybe also enlighten you on some things you probably don't know about me. Ready?

Let me explain why I drink vodka: I like the way it tastes with tonic water, and somebody told me once it doesn't have any carbohydrates. I'll continue to believe that even if it's not true. You also can't smell it on my breath. I usually don't care if someone can smell alcohol on me, but if I'm standing in line at a bank, I don't want someone sniffing and trying to figure me out.

Let me explain why bus drivers should like me: I'm the kind of rider who always has the exact fare and waiting to turn it over as soon as I get on the bus. I'm not the kind of passenger who starts looking for change after getting on the bus or asking other passengers if they have change for a \$5 bill.

Let me explain why I'm usually nice to telephone solicitors: I've had to do this a few times in my life to help make ends meet. It's a thankless, shitty job. You get paid very little money, and people can be nasty as hell. Really, all a person has to do is say, "No, thank you" and hang up.

Let me explain why I don't answer the phone after 8 p.m.: If I'm drinking – and I'm a big boy; sometimes I am – I don't feel like acting normal on the phone when I'm clearly not. I've heard other people's slurred speech on the phone, and it's not very becoming.

Let me explain my reason to continue to smoke: It relaxes me and goes great with my coffee in the morning. I like it when I'm writing. Something's gonna get me at the end, and it might as well be something I enjoy.

Let me explain why I enjoy going to Northern Kentucky bars: I can smoke inside.

Let me explain why I have only two cups of coffee in the morning: I might want more; but if I have more than two cups, I start to feel sick and my heart starts to race.

Let me explain my giving money to panhandlers: I usually think I'm a paycheck away from being there myself. It can't be a good time asking strangers for money, so I try to put myself in their place.

Let me explain why I'm no longer an accountant: After 33 years of income

statements, balance sheets and general ledger account analysis, enough was enough. However, for fun, sometimes my old accounting buddies and I get together and prepare amortization schedules – just for the pure enjoyment of it.

Let me explain why I'm now a writer: In my youth and in a lot of my adult life, I was always talked out of it – you know, I'll never be able to support myself by doing it. Over 12 years ago, I said the hell with it; it's what I want to do. So far I'm still able to buy vodka and

cigarettes, so I'll consider this career change a complete success.

Let me explain why I'm diabetic: It's my mother's fault.

Let me explain my view on friends who desert you when you're down and when you really need them: They really weren't your friends anyway.

Let me explain why I'm not a beer drinker: Before vodka, I was always a beer drinker. But years ago, at a bar down around the river, I really got sick on a brand. I haven't really enjoyed a beer since.

Let me explain my opinion on Jay Leno: Did you really think this guy would walk away from late night? He was always kind of "waiting in the lobby" for Conan to tank, but Conan didn't get enough time to build his show, in part because of Leno's poor showing as the lead in at 10 o'clock. Whatever. I never thought Leno was funny. I'll continue to watch Letterman.

Let me explain why I don't really care if you think I'm a "character": Now that I'm older with longish, grayish blonde hair that's too long, I've become increasingly known as someone who says what he thinks – namely a character. "Oh, he's a character. ... Oh, you never know what's going to come out of his mouth." Etc, etc, etc. The reality is I'm pretty much the same person I've always been. If getting older gives me a license to speak my mind without being judged, I'll accept being that character you think I've recently become.

Let me explain my continued annoyance with iceberg lettuce: Even upscale restaurants in Cincinnati continue to serve this crap. It has no nutritional value. None. It's like eating tap water.

All right—done for now. Of course there's more to explain about myself, but *Streetvibes* refused to devote this entire issue to me. Yeah, I know. Pretty damn selfish.



Larry Gross. Photo by Andrew Anderson.

Larry Gross's latest book, *Living Out Loud*, is available at barnesandnoble.com and other online bookstores.

The Demise of Hip-Hop

Dear Editor,

I really enjoyed the piece by Ariana Shahandeh in your latest edition of *Streetvibes*, entitled “New Voices of the Voiceless” (issue of Jan. 1-15). Shahandeh writes so passionately about the demise of the hip-hop genre and about the amazing work of people like Radiant Amar and Jasiri X, who are working to save it. It really inspired me to seek out music such as theirs that really address all that the world is going through today.

Music is such a strong outlet for so many individuals, and getting rid of all of the Hollywood-superficial musicians and going back to music that connects with reality could have such a strong impact on the youth of today. I hope that featuring Radiant Amar and Jasiri X in your newspaper speaks to other people like it spoke to me and raises awareness of the hardships that everyone faces in the world each day.

Keep up the amazing work!

Claire Heinichen
Cincinnati

Music as a Refuge

To the editor:

In reading the local newspaper, the article that stood out to me was “New Voices of the Voiceless” (issue of Jan. 1-15) As I read it I just made so many connections. The music and its importance in tough times relates to *The Soloist* and the story of Nathaniel on the streets getting by with his violin. Music really seems to be the best rehab for people going through tribulations, just like Jay Z. He is definitely a rare case since he made it big. However, I agree with the writer and the local artists’ views on how fame and big time artists are too focused on the money and fame. I almost hope Jasiri X doesn’t make it big so his views stay pure and his songs stay clean.

The second connection I made in thinking about this article was the comments made about self-absorbed musicians. I probably would never have thought much of it except that in school right now we are reading Walt Whitman. His poems were intended to reach out to the common man back in the late 19th century. However, his book was misunderstood and nationally rejected. I see the book’s failure at the time due to Whitman’s overuse of personal experiences. Many infer the poet is cocky and pompous. I do not agree yet I do see how they could make this judgment.

I think that popular artists who only sing about themselves rub off to listeners like Whitman did. While their songs may be catchy and appeal to the publics’ auditory senses, the meaning is often shallow. Jasiri X and Radiant Amar are totally right in their criticism of today’s trend to glorify hard-core partying when really alcohol can lead to homelessness. It’d be ideal to have more modest, conservative artists spreading positive messages of hope rather than promoting bad habits that lead to troublesome society.

If you ever are in touch with either artist, please pass along my support. I listened to them both on youtube and enjoy their new outlook on hip hop as well as their messages.

Lastly, I thought “Turn in your Gun Day” was a neat idea. While people probably underestimate me and most of my classmates for any connection or empathy to what goes on downtown and in “bad” neighborhoods, I have a direct connection through my tennis coach. He grew up in Over-the-Rhine and throughout his childhood alone saw friends and family members shot before his eyes. I admire him for making a life for himself, avoiding trouble when it tempted him.

I think the music piece offers some hope to people who find themselves in what seems to be a terrible situation that feels never-ending. Slaves in the 1800s used music as therapy; it served as a kind of refuge they could enjoy in the midst of all their suffering. Music today can help people, too. First, if you’re good enough, you can turn it into a profession. If not, just singing can bring a smile to your face. The messages in songs also give hope to those feeling desperate. And the fact that all of this is discussed to a degree in the newspaper enhances people’s knowledge of musical healing.

I really enjoyed the article and newspaper. Good luck to your vendors. God bless those who passed away last year. Thank you for coming to our school and talking to us.

Elizabeth Ann Blackburn
Cincinnati

Military Recruiter Lied

To the Editor:

In response to “Stop Abuses by Military Recruiters” (issue of March 1-14), I went into the military in 1966, and the military recruiter at 500 Main St. told me I could go to Hawaii, if I signed up for four years, and avoid Vietnam. I arrived at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, at the receiving barracks. Within a week I was assigned to an infantry company, and a month later I was training troops from Taiwan, Philippines and South Korea. I was with a jungle warfare training unit that was preparing new recruits for Vietnam. On Nov. 2, 1967, I was shipped out on a merchant ship to Vietnam with the 11th Infantry Brigade. The recruiter lied.

Sonny Williams
Clifton

Firing people isn’t Easy

To the Editor:

First of all I’d like to applaud you on what a wonderful paper you are producing. *Streetvibes* seems to be a wonderful outlet for news that I simply have not seen elsewhere. I am the photo-editor of *The Scroll*, the paper at my high school, and I definitely appreciate the breadth of content and the interesting perspectives presented in each of the articles. I received a copy of the paper following a presentation on the homeless, and it’s given me a perspective on certain hot-topic issues that I hadn’t seen before.

One thing I wanted to comment on was the article “On the Streets, Not ‘Up in the Air’ ” (issue of Jan. 15-30). I definitely understand the author’s point that not all those who get let go react angrily, but I suppose I have another one of those contrasting viewpoints. My father works in relatively the same business as Clooney’s character does, and I would argue that the reason the movie focused in so much on the people that became violent is because these people have the most effect on people like my dad. My father spends most of his time on his airplane (he is just about to break 2 million miles), and while the main portion of his job is not to fire people, this part certainly upsets him.

Whenever you google my dad, up pop up blogs describing my father as Satan or even insulting his mother or my sister and myself. Even though my dad is just doing his job, many people take it personally and thus backlash against him and his team. In one office in Tampa, someone even threatened my father with a bomb. While smaller staffs may not respond in such an ugly manner, “corporate crap” is different.

While the movie may not have taken the direction the author suggested (and please recommend the movie *Outsourced* to them as, if they really want to see O&O, that’s their gig), I think it was successful in exploring the psychological toll that those kinds of jobs have on the people that do them. My dad is convinced I think he’s a monster because of what he does. He’s never home, people hate on him over the Internet, and his job is basically to make some people miserable. It’s not all he does, but it’s a part of it, and it’s something that affects him every day.

I really enjoyed reading your paper, and if I have the opportunity to get my hands on another copy in the future, I certainly will take advantage of it.

Ilana Habib
Cincinnati

Homeless People Deserve Respect

To the Editor:

Reading the Jan. 1 edition of *Streetvibes*, I came across a phrase that really resonated with me. In the article, “Homeless Coalition Marks 25 Years,” Liz Carter is quoted as saying, “Ten years ago I was one of those people who thought that, in Cincinnati, if you’re not making it, it’s probably because you’re not trying hard enough.” I have a confession, too: I believed the exact same thing.

When I passed a homeless man I thought, GGosh. He should really get a job and stop begging for money.” I categorized all homeless people under the same, lazy, sloppy stereotype. But after hearing the representatives from the Homeless Coalition that came to my school last week, Grady’s story, and reading your newspaper, I have a new understanding of the homeless.

I now know that every person is different: different story, different personality, different life. I know that many become homeless due to circumstances completely out of their control. I know that being homeless presents difficulties and situations that I can’t even begin to imagine. And, most importantly, I know that each homeless person deserves the same respect I give to every other person I meet. Thank you for helping me to better understand my fellow human beings.

Ali Breneman
Cincinnati

Have something on your mind?
Do you agree or disagree
with an article?

Let us know:

117 E. 12th Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

streetvibes2@yahoo.com

Need Help or Want to Help?

Shelter: Women and Children

Central Access Point	381-SAFE
Cincinnati Union Bethel	768-6907
300 Lytle Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Bethany House	557-2873
1841 Fairmount Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45214	
Grace Place Catholic Worker House	681-2365
6037 Cary Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45224	
Salvation Army	762-5660
131 E. 12th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
YWCA Battered Women’s Shelter	872-9259

Shelter: Men

City Gospel Mission	241-5525
1419 Elm Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Justice Watch	241-0490
St. Fran/St. Joe Catholic Work. House	381-4941
1437 Walnut Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Mt. Airy Shelter	661-4620

Shelter: Both

Anthony House (Youth)	961-4080
2728 Glendora Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45209	
Caracole (HIV/AIDS)	761-1480
1821 Summit Road, Cinti, Ohio 45237	
Drop Inn Center	721-0643
217 W. 12th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Interfaith Hospitality Network	471-1100
Lighthouse Youth Center (Youth)	221-3350
3330 Jefferson, Cinti, Ohio 45220	

Housing:

CMHA	721-4580
Excel Development	632-7149
OTR Community Housing	381-1171
114 W. 14th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Tender Mercies	721-8666
27 W. 12th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Tom Geiger House	961-4555
Dana Transitional Bridge Services	751-0643
Volunteers of America	381-1954

Food/Clothing

Lord’s Pantry	621-5300
OTR/Walnut Hills Kitchen & Pantry	961-1983
OTR: 1620 Vine Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Walnut Hills: 2631 Gilbert, Cinti, Ohio 45206	
Our Daily Bread	621-6364
1730 Race Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
St. Francis Soup Kitchen	535-2719

Churches Active in Northside	591-2246
4230 Hamilton Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45223	
FreeStore/FoodBank	241-1064
112 E. Liberty Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Madisonville Ed & Assistance Center	271-5501
4600 Erie Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45227	
Serves area codes: 45226, 45227, 45208, 45209	
St. Vincent de Paul	562-8841
1125 Bank Street, Cinti, Ohio 45214	

Treatment: Men

Charlie’s 3/4 House	784-1853
2121 Vine Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
DIC Live In Program	721-0643
Prospect House	921-1613
682 Hawthorne Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45205	
Starting Over	961-2256

Treatment: Women

First Step Home	961-4663
2203 Fulton, Cinti, Ohio 45206	

Treatment: Both

AA Hotline	351-0422
CCAT	381-6672
830 Ezzard Charles Dr. Cinti, Ohio 45214	
Joseph House (Veterans)	241-2965
1522 Republic Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Hamilton County ADAS Board	946-4888
Recovery Health Access Center	281-7422
Sober Living	681-0324
Talbert House	641-4300

Advocacy

Catholic Social Action	421-3131
Community Action Agency	569-1840
Contact Center	381-4242
1227 Vine Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Franciscan JPIC	721-4700
Gr. Cinti Coalition for the Homeless	421-7803
117 E. 12th Street, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Intercommunity Justice & Peace Cr.	579-8547
Legal Aid Society	241-9400
Ohio Justice & Policy Center	421-1108
Faces Without Places	363-3300
Stop AIDS	421-2437

Health

Center for Respite Care	621-1868
3550 Washington Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45229	

Crossroad Health Center	381-2247
5 E. Liberty St. Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Health Resource Center	357-4602
Homeless Mobile Health Van	352-2902
McMicken Dental Clinic	352-6363
40 E. McMicken Ave, Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Mental Health Access Point	558-8888
Mercy Franciscan at St. John	981-5800
1800 Logan St. Cinti, Ohio 45202	
NAMI of Hamilton County	458-6670
PATH Outreach	977-4489

Other Resources

Center Independent Living Options	241-2600
Emmanuel Community Center	241-2563
1308 Race St. Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Peaslee Neighborhood Center	621-5514
214 E. 14th St. Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Franciscan Haircuts from the Heart	381-0111
1800 Logan St. Cinti, Ohio 45202	
Goodwill industries	771-4800
Healing Connections	751-0600
Mary Magdalen House	721-4811
1223 Main St. Cinti, Ohio 45202	
People Working Cooperatively	351-7921
The Caring Place	631-1114
United Way	211
Women Helping Women	977-5541

Hamilton/Middletown

St. Raephaels	863-3184
Salvation Army	863-1445
Serenity House Day Center	422-8555
Open Door Pantry	868-3276

Northern Kentucky

Brighton Center	859-491-8303
799 Ann St. Newport, KY	
ECHO/Hosea House	859-261-5857
Fairhaven Resuce Mission	859-491-1027
Homeward Bound Youth	859-581-1111
Mathews House	859-261-8009
Homeless & Housing Coalition	859-727-0926
Parish Kitchen	859-581-7745
Pike St. Clinic	859-291-9321
Transitions, Inc	859-491-4435
Welcome House of NKY	859-431-8717
205 West Pike Street, Covington, KY 41011	
Women’s Crisis Center	859-491-3335
VA Domiciliary	859-559-5011
VA Homeless	859-572-6226

Vendor Voice

Halfway Houses Help the Community

Rehabilitation and a way to become productive

By **GEORGE HERRELL**
STREETVIBES VENDOR

The term “halfway house” might conjure up thoughts of illiterate convicts who’ve spent most of their lives behind bars or of drug addicts who’ve fried their brains with dope until they can barely complete the simplest thought without assistance.

In fact, however, today’s halfway houses are “transitioning stations” which contain a wealth of talents, ideas and abilities from all walks of life, and although there are those few individuals who simply hope to use them as easy endings to long stints in jail, more and more you’ll find that halfway house programs are last-ditch havens of hope for men and women alike who’ve made poor choices in the past and now want nothing more than to improve the quality of their lives.

Programs such as Volunteers of America, Talbert House and Cornerstone, just to name a few, offer such services as “corrective thinking” courses, G.E.D. classes, employment counseling, as well as individual

They provide structure and guidance that individuals being released from prison wouldn’t otherwise receive, while at the same time holding clients entirely accountable for their actions, achievements and/or failures.

case-management geared toward ensuring that ex-offenders are equipped to re-enter society as productive members of the community.

They provide structure and guidance that individuals being released from prison wouldn’t otherwise receive, while at the same time holding clients entirely accountable for their actions, achievements and/or failures.

In some instances they even serve an interventional function, accepting probationers with the hope that having the same services offered to them might prevent the need for expensive, extended incarcerations at state facilities.

More often than, not halfway houses benefit the community as well as their clients by offering a centralized pool of employable individuals eager to prove themselves in the job market and eventually releasing those individuals as successful productive individuals to their respective communities once their debts to society have been paid.

So the next time that you hear of the possibility that a halfway house might be opening in your neighborhood, take the time to “play the tape all the way through,” honestly weigh the alternatives, check the statistics. Make an informed choice.

Farron Allen's Body of Work

Bits and pieces of humanity in a cry for freedom

Farron Allen grew up in the mountains of southern West Virginia, the product of three generations of coalminers. He was raised by loving and religious grandparents who imparted to him the rigorous and somewhat rigid teachings of their Southern Baptist faith.

As a child, he helped his father build things around the house; it gave him a good sense for materials and constructions that proved important in his artistic direction.

Allen is a sculptor who uses primarily fabricated or found metal objects, casted and welded together, thus given a new life.

"In my work, I usually incorporate fragments – found, given, from my own history, of my creation – that I weld together in a final form that bears a special meaning," he says. "The finished product makes a statement and connects to me, my art, the history of the objects included, the people they represent."

Allen is also a popular art teacher at the University of Cincinnati (UC), where he teaches sculpture foundry.

Despite his early inclinations to art, reflected by his constant drawing as a child and throughout school, Allen did not pursue art education until in his late twenties. In college, he earned two degrees in social work, specializing in aging. He worked then in nursing homes and community programs, an occupation he enjoyed but that he interrupted, relocating to Florida for personal reasons.

When he returned a few years later to his native West Virginia, not finding a satisfying job in social work, he worked as a toll collector on the West Virginia Turnpike. This allowed him to further his artistic

interest: working on the midnight shift, he took advantage of its slow pace to re-immers himself in art and create a whole body of drawings collected by friends, coworkers and regular truckers who came through his lane.

Eight years later, due to the tedious nature of his otherwise well paying job, Allen decided to

quit it and pursue instead an art career. He enrolled at West Virginia University, received a bachelor of fine arts degree in sculpture and graphic design, then at UC for a master of fine arts degree in sculpture. Allen has lived in Cincinnati since then, creating his own art and teaching at the university.

The human figure always held an important place in his work. Abstracted life-size at the beginning, it became progressively decomposed into body parts, hands, faces, incorporated in sculptures with found objects, tools, spoons, crosses. Skulls and bones were also often prominent.

This imagery, termed the *Attack on Innocence* by Allen, coincided with the emerging of the AIDS epidemic and Allen's experience of the



Farron Allen stands behind his sculpture, *Reaching Out*.
Photo by Bill Howes.

death of many of his friends and lovers. It was his reaction to the physical disintegration of a large generation of young individuals, also to his anger at the negative societal response to the disease because it affected predominantly homosexual men.

Other concerns that transpired all along through Allen's works pertained to religion, its conflict with sexuality, its misuse for power and control; the moral hypocrisy that frequently rules society, the imposed conformist values that disagree with the individual's basic aspirations. Being raised in a poor area controlled by corporations, brought up in a religion that denied and denigrated his own sexual expression and brainwashed with a set of rules contradictory to his thoughts and beliefs generated anger that came out as a statement in his work. Allen's response, initially visceral and cathartic, later became message-laden, compassionate in its story telling.

"I want my art to speak to people, to trigger questioning and thinking, to generate a reaction, even if not always positive," he says. "I want the history behind my work and its implications to be communicated and perceived."

Commemorating those who died from AIDS, Allen did a series of altars with lights and mounds of bones, commentaries on death and life. Addressing the mixing of religion and sexuality, he did an installation that included a cross composed of thousands of small crucifixes and an altar made of waxed underwear having phallic lights inside them.

Reflecting on his own religious upbringing, childhood and sexuality, he did a series of *Hair Boxes*, incorporating his grandmother's jewelry, family bibles, crucifixes, his own hair that his grandmother had saved, casted body parts. He was thus enclosing his personal history with its conflicts and contradictions inside a box.

Hammered into Form, a bronze and steel black sculpture, represents a hand caught between two hammers, tools used to forge metal. He meant it as an allegory to how we're formed as human beings, forged by our upbringing, education, external factors, opportunities. The hand appears stuck, yet seems to reach out for change. A spoon, symbol of what is spoon-fed and forced down one's throat, but also of medicine and cure, is placed in front of it. A twisted piece of metal rod welded to the side alludes to knotted and painful internal organs. The piece also addresses the boundaries and regulations set by government and laws, often to profit those in power, at the expense of the individual.

Reaching Out, a similarly themed sculpture, represents a hand covered with nails, displayed on a heavy tall structure with a chain. The hand reaches out but is weighted down and imprisoned.

"Body parts are a frequent metaphor in my work," Allen says. "They deal with the idea of attack, initially centered on AIDS – the rejection of a generation of people by government policy, morality, fear of contamination – but also attack on the essence and integrity of the individual by religion, politics, power and greed."

Through his art and teaching, Allen continues his plea to liberate the human from all that ties it down, especially rules hypocritically condoned by society. The cocooned, enclosed body that appeared in his earlier installations gave way later to free winged figures and angels. It is a transformation he would like to trigger and see happen in everyone, including himself.

"I cannot imagine myself not doing art," Allen says. "Art for me is everything. I make it, teach it, surround myself with it, use it to communicate and to hopefully make a change."

Artists as Activists

By SAAD GHOSN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Hammered into Form, bronze and steel sculpture by Farron Allen.
Photo by Bill Howes